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AUTHOR Austin, Patricia
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ABSTRACT

Intermediate and junior high school students learn about the social history of Vermont by studying events and trends during a 30-year period of the life of a famous Vermont native, Calvin Coolidge. Although designed for students in Vermont, materials can easily be adapted for use in other states, particularly those in the New England area. In separate sections, students are introduced to life in smalltown Vermont at the turn of the century, early 20th century reform efforts, a major flood that occurred in Vermont in 1927, and the life and presidency of Calvin Coolidge. Each section contains a reading selection, a list of recommended readings, a vocabulary development exercise, and a list of student activities, projects, and field trips. Where appropriate, prose and poetry selections are included in the student reading. A teacher evaluation form concludes the publication. (LP)

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STUDYING VERMONT:

MAKING CONNECTIONS. CAL COOLIDGE'S VERMONT:

1900 - 1930.

PATRICIA AUSTIN

1981

SO 015 768

STUDYING VERMONT: MAKING CONNECTIONS

CAL COOLIDGE'S VERMONT: 1900 - 1930

To the student:

One of the best known Vermonters of the twentieth century is Calvin Coolidge, thirtieth President of the United States. During his life time, many significant changes took place in the way Vermonters as well as other Americans lived and the way in which they thought of themselves. By studying the material in this unit about the years 1900 to 1930 and by trying out some of the activities, you should discover what some of those changes were, why they happened, and how they relate to our life in Vermont today.

Underlined words are listed at the end of each section as vocabulary words. The reading will be easier if you know the meaning of these words before you start.

These are the topics you will be studying:

The Small Town---------- 2

Reform---------- 13

Flood!---------- 23

The President---------- 31

Cal Coolidge's Vermont: The Small Town

As the time approached for the century to "turn," some people felt very sure that when 1899 was over and 1900 had begun, great things were in store for America. They enthusiastically greeted January 1, 1900, with fireworks, cheering, and hope. For others, however, it was a very upsetting time. They believed that the country could not adjust to such newness. There were even people who believed firmly that with the turn of the century, the end of the world was near at hand.

Yet in 1900 the world proceeded pretty much as it had in 1899. Many Americans awoke on January 1 to find themselves living in a small town, knowing their neighbors well and continuing their accustomed ways of life.

For Vermonters in the early 1900's small town life was becoming even more typical a pattern than that of life in an isolated rural setting. Asked to define what a small town was, the inhabitants of such towns might give different descriptions: it's a main street with a church and store; it's more than ten houses within hollering distance; it's a place where you know everyone and see them regularly if you take short walks; it's a settlement that's not a city and not a farm. A Vermonter's sense of humor might inspire this definition: "If you're in one, you know it."

Some small towns were founded because of the natural attractions of a particular geographic location; for example, a good supply of water that could be harnessed for mill work would attract a group of people to try to make their living in that location. Small towns were also formed when a group of people determined to live near each other for mutual support, perhaps because they shared the same religious

beliefs or the same ethnic heritage. Other towns grew because their locations made them reasonable stopping places for supplies between large settlements and rural areas. Towns grew up where businesses and services were needed and where the people who supplied the goods and services could sustain themselves and their families.

Something in the nature of people as well as the geography of the land promoted the growth of small towns, however. The early settlers of New England were a communal group. They believed that people lived better when supported by a social structure made up of persons like themselves. They were willing to travel a distance to their fields in order to have their homes close to other houses.

There were some obvious advantages to living in a small town, and these were preached like a gospel by the poet Vachel Lindsay. Instead of remaining in his small home town of Springfield, Illinois, he travelled from the Mississippi to the Atlantic to point out to people the joys of living in a place large enough for social interaction but not so large that life seemed out of control. For his poems and songs, he was paid in food and lodging after his poetry readings, one of which he did at the University of Vermont. The most worthwhile things in the world, he said, were those found in one's own home and one's own home town.

Not only Lindsay believed that small town life was the "good" life -- good in the sense of being pleasant and also in the sense of making people who lived there be good. Story writers, painters, politicians, and "plain folk" also claimed that such a life was best. It was the American way, where there could truly be democracy because everyone could know each other and come together to work out common decisions. Small towns are wholesome, they said -- good places for

bringing up children, where there is a sense of security and a feeling of belonging. There are opportunities in a small town, the supporters also said, and people who don't take to farming have a variety of trades they can learn in order to make a living and be useful to the community.

On the other hand, life in a small town could get rather dreary when nothing of much consequence ever happened. Employment and recreation opportunities were usually not very varied, and increasingly through this time period young people left their home towns to look for excitement or for work in larger, more cosmopolitan surroundings. Several authors and painters began to express how unattractive and dull they found small towns. Instead of emphasizing the closeness and warmth of the town, these artists pointed out the prying nature of people who lived there, the gossip, and the meaness towards those who didn't conform to the town's standards of correct behavior.

While the small town is a typical way of life for many Vermonters today, each town is unique, and an individual may respond either as those who fled small town life after the turn of the century or those who stayed and raised their families in the "good life."

Think about your own town and your own attitudes as you read some of the suggested material in this unit or work on some of the suggested projects.

VISUAL PORTRAYALS

The following portrayals of small town life will help students to see how strongly attitude can affect what one sees. Slides of the paintings or photographs can be made from reproductions in books through the use of a camera and copy stand.

Portrayal of the Small Town

Edward Hopper's "Early Sunday Morning" in Alexander Eliot's Three Hundred Years of American Painting (NY: Time, Inc. 1957)

Grandma Moses' "The Checkered House", "Wash Day", "Picnic" and "July Fourth" in Otto Kallir's Grandma Moses (NY: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1973)

Joseph Pickett's "Manchester Valley" in Jean Lipman's American Primitive Painting (NY: Oxford University Press. 1942).

Grant Wood's "Spring in Town" in James Dennis' Grant Wood: A Study in American Art and Culture (NY: Viking Press, 1975)

John Kane's "Turtle Creek Valley No. 1" in American Painting: 1900 - 1970 (NY: Time-Life Books, 1970).

Photographs from Vermont Life may also serve to help the students question the effect of attitude in visualizing a scene.

Photographs faithful to the period can be found in the following books: New England Past: Photographs 1880-1915. Jane Sugden, ed. NY: Harry N. Abrams, 1981.

New England Reflections: 1882-1907. Photographs by the Howes Brothers. Alan B. Newman, ed. NY: Pantheon Books, 1981.

Vermont Album: A Collection of Early Vermont Photographs. Ralph Nading Hill. Brattleboro, VT.: Stephen Greene Press, 1974.

RECOMMENDED READING

To give students a more graphic idea of what life in a Vermont small town during this time period would have been like on a day to day basis, they should read or view Thornton Wilder's Our Town.

Some questions to consider:

--- What is different about daily life in Grovers Corners and our own daily life?

For example, does a milkman still deliver milk? Does the corner drug store serve milk shakes? Do parents worry about their children marrying before they're "settled"?

--- What aspects of daily life change even during the period from when the play begins to when it ends?

--- What kind of employment opportunities existed in the town for young people?

--- What kind of recreation opportunities were available?

--- For which characters was small town life the "good life"?

Were there any characters for whom this was not a good life?

--- What are your own reactions to life in Grovers Corners?

RECOMMENDED ACTIVITY

RESEARCHING YOUR TOWN

Doing research may mean looking in books or magazines or newspapers for information. It may also mean asking people, going places, and collecting items. Consider using some of these sources of information in finding out about your town in general or some particular aspect of it:

--- residents who make a hobby out of studying local history;

--- people who have lived in the town for a long time and who have good memories;

--- written material like diaries that a local historical society may have;

--- discussions with officials of the town government;

--- records of the town housed by the town government;

--- old newspapers that have been reprinted on microfiche or microfilm.

The class should begin this activity by deciding what the students most want to know or most need to know about the places where they live. Here are some possible questions to explore:

1. Who started this town? When?
2. Why did people settle here? Did the geography of the place have much to do with the decision?
3. What are the demographics of the town?
4. What do people do for a living if they live in this town?
5. Are there ethnic groups in the town? If so, do they live in just one part of the town? Are they proud of their heritage?

6. What community celebrations are there? Where do people come together to meet each other?
7. What kind of structure of government runs the town?
8. What is the town noted for?
9. What was it like here in 1910 or 1920?
10. Are there any especially attractive, ugly or important buildings in town?
11. What major problems does the town face in the next few years?

Useful resources for the teacher in setting up this activity:

The Local Community: A Handbook for Teachers. Prepared by the High School Geography Project. NY: The MacMillan Co., 1971.

David Weitzman. My Backyard History Book. The Brown Paper School Series. Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1975.

SUGGESTED READINGS
ABOUT
SMALL TOWN LIFE

I. For the skilled reader:

Ethan Frome by Edith Wharton

Main Street by Sinclair Lewis

Winesburg, Ohio by Sherwood Anderson

II. Books from which selections can be made for the average reader:

Spoon River Anthology by Edgar Lee Masters

A New England Nun and Other Stories by Mary Wilkins Freeman

The Children of the Night by Edward Arlington Robinson

The Love Nest and Other Stories by Ring Lardner

Nostalgia USA. Or... If You Don't Like the 1960's
Why Don't You Go Back Where You Came From? by R.L. Duffus

III. General reading material:

Newspapers:

---from one's own home town

---one's own compared with a city daily

---today's compared with one from an earlier time period

Some questions you might ask:

---is there more local news than state or national?
Which is featured more prominently?

---what kinds of things in town make news? Births,
deaths, crimes, achievements, cultural events?
What does the town seem to value?

---what can you guess about the daily life of the people in town by looking at the newspaper and knowing nothing else about the residents but what you read there?

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

----Draw a picture of your town and be prepared to explain why you included some things and left out others.

----Photograph the things or places in your town that most clearly say what your town means to you.

----Make a travel brochure that would "sell" your town to people on vacation.

----Write a play about your town today or about your town at a significant time in the past.

----Make a bound copy of your report, or the class' report, about your town as a whole or specific aspects of it and donate it to the library.

----Bring in artifacts from the time period 1900-1930. Explain what they were used for, why we no longer use them, what if anything we use in their place.*

----Tape an interview with relatives or town members about their recollections of town life as they were growing up.

----Hold a "get to know your town" celebration with posters, students as lecturers on their research findings, guest lecturers from the town, artifacts on display.

*Teachers can investigate getting artifacts from the following sources:

1. local historical societies
2. The Vermont Historical Society, Education Division, Montpelier, VT 05602
3. The Shelburne Museum, Education Division, Shelburne, VT 05482

VOCABULARY

TECHNICAL WORDS:

microfiche

microfilm

demographics

artifact

WORDS TO DEFINE AND THINK ABOUT:

cosmopolitan	Related words: cosmos, metropolitan, Cosmopolitan magazine.
communal	Related words: commune, communism, community.
ethnic	What value do you put on things that are labelled "ethnic": clothes, food, art, music, the people themselves?

Cal Coolidge's Vermont: Reform

Vermonters shuddered as they read about harsh conditions in steel mills and on assembly lines in the early 1900's. Yet even in Vermont the industrial worker's life was not an easy one. A working day might last twelve to sixteen hours in an environment that did not have to meet any special health or safety standards. If workers were injured on the job, they were responsible for their own medical bills. If they couldn't return to work, they had to depend on their family and relatives or the generosity of their neighbors to help them out.

There were quite a few important industries in Vermont in the early part of the twentieth century, producing marble, granite, asbestos, scales, pipe organs, wire screens, turret lathes, piano sounding boards, silos, portable ovens, chairs, saw mill machinery, and burial caskets. In 1900 there were 434,641 people living in Vermont; 28,179 made their living and perhaps a living for their whole family by working in industry. By 1910 this figure had increased by 5500 people, even though the population as a whole had gone down. As the numbers of industrial workers increased, the problems of their working life got more attention, especially from politicians.

During the election of 1906, those workers who thought of themselves as "labor" pushed for reforms to correct what they thought were unfair rules and unhealthy conditions in industrial work. One of the candidates for governor, Percival Clement, put in writing his answers to the kind of questions that were being asked by workers during the campaign.

Question: Will you take action towards the passage of an employers liability act?

Clement : We never had an employers liability act in this state, but have depended on the common law...I can see no good reason for a change.

Question: Do you favor giving public employees an eight-hour working day?

Clement : Why give employees an eight-hour day? Neither you nor I are limited by law in our labor to eight hours... The state employee should be required to perform his full duty and should not be allowed to consider his job a soft snap.

He lost the election, Eventually laws were passed that provided for workmen's compensation and for regulations to guard a worker's safety.

An issue concerning working conditions that got sympathy from many people was that of child labor. Because wages were low, a family might need the money children could bring in just to give them enough buying power to survive. A poet of the time, Sarah Cleghorn, left no doubt in this poem what she thought of owners of factories that would use the cheap labor of children to make their profits.

THE GOLF LINKS LIE SO NEAR THE MILL

The golf links lie so near the mill
That almost every day
The laboring children can look out
And see the men at play.

The treatment of children was important to those who wanted to reform society in general and working conditions in particular. They thought children should be in schools, not in factories; in homes, not on the street or in orphanages. Daniel Cady wrote a poem expressing the anger many people felt at the lack of care available for children, and the movement for the state legislature to "do something" got stronger. By 1915, the legislators had passed a law that limited the age at which a child could work, the kind of work children could do, and the kind of conditions under which they could work.

While complaints were coming from laborers who believed the government--state and federal--should come to their aid, the Secretary of State in Vermont insisted that things weren't so bad here. He said that Vermont was free of "vexatious and ever threatening evils" and he invited more industries to move to this state. This is how he described the conditions of the industrial worker in Vermont in 1907: they had their "residence in small cities and villages adjacent to the countryside with the resultant benefits of sanitary housing, abundance of pure food and normal price,... convenient and first class education facilities for their children, the opportunity to own their own homes."

On the national scene, writers were publishing articles and books that condemned the variety of ways in which workers were being abused in industry. These writings put the blame on the people who ran the industries for wanting profits even at the expense of ruining workers' lives. President Theodore Roosevelt called some of these writers "muckrakers" and said they had gone too far in writing exposés. You might want to read some of their work, listed under suggested readings, and try to find modern writers like them. (We would probably call them "investigative journalists" now.)

At the same time that the muckrakers wrote about how badly workers in industry were being treated, other writers wrote essays and sketches to show how satisfying work could be if it was done close to nature and free of supervision. Read "The Pulp Peeler" as an example of such a piece of writing. Decide how convincing and how accurate the author is.

RHYMES OF VERMONT RURAL LIFE

But now you can't get near your work
Unless you pass some tall asylum,
So full of kids it takes a clerk
To index up their cards and file 'em;
They wait like little soldiers there,
But oft in vain, for home promotion;
Their wistful eyes for foster care
And foster love bespeak devotion.

I'd rather wear a rag-cloth blouse
And have my shoes a trifle dirty,
Than live in some great Gothic house
And jest be "Orphan Number Thirty";
I'd rather have some farmer's wife
A-tell me, "Fetch the kindling, Charlie,"
Than be fenced in for half my life
And never have no soup but barley.

The war, may be, will do us good
And make us less parured and pelfish;
We'd all be thankful if it would,
We'd rather all be nice than selfish;
But too much salaried system, p'r'aps,
Too many letters "dic" and formal
Have pushed the children from our laps
And warped us from the Christian normal.

by Daniel Cady

RHYMES OF VERMONT RURAL LIFE

"RAISING A CHILD" IN VERMONT

HOW good the folks all used to be,
How good and kind to one another!
'Twas seldom that you'd ever see
A boy or girl without a mother;
For if the truly mother sped
Away to fill a loftier station,
Some friend stood sponsor for the dead
And kept intact the dear relation.

Your grandpa's folks, you're proud to own,
Brought up some boy the spotted fever,
Or canker rash left all alone---
I used to hear how Milo Seaver
When four years old lost all his kin,
His father, mother, brother, sister,
But Deacon Densmore took him in
And kept him till his name was "Mister."

'Most everybody raised a child
That had no special claim to favor;
They didn't let a boy run wild,
A girl had friends enough to save her;
That lad that Uncle Paul espoused,
The little Matt--in manhood, later,
The nation's Senate charmed and roused
And early hardships made him greater.

VERMONT SKETCHES

The Pulp Peeler

With his ax and lunch basket the pulp peeler climbs the hills into the forests. The grass is still wet with last night's dew and the odor of the pine forests fill the air. Here in the silence of the forest broken only by the cawing of the crow and the song of the thrush and the robin, he spends the day felling and peeling pulp logs.

With his "two-bitted" ax he fells a tree, clears it of branches and cuts off its top. Then with an instrument called the "peeler" he soon clears the bark from the upper side of the log. With his hook he turns the log so that its under side will be up, then taking hold of the bark at the lower end of the log, he strips the log clean.

At noon he eats his lunch by the side of a spring of clear cold water. His seat is a carpet of pine needles inches deep and dotted with cones of the pine trees. His afternoon continues the work of the morning. He loves the solitude of the forest and the odor of the pine tree, and he knows that he is doing his bit in producing the world's supply of paper.

In the afternoon as the shadows begin to lengthen he takes the pathway down the hillside towards his own fireside. His children run to meet him. He stoops to lift a wee toddler to his shoulder while he lays a hand upon the head of the child who walks by his side. After supper he rests from the toil of the day while his wife clears the dishes away. The allurements of the city life is beyond his ken and cannot appeal to him. Contented and happy is the life of this pulp peeler in a valley of the NewEngland forest region.

****

RECOMMENDED ACTIVITIES

---------Choose an area of concern in contemporary society - in the nation, your own community, or your own school. Prepare a campaign for reform. This could involve persuasive writing, posters, buttons and bumper stickers, speeches and panel discussions.

---------Explore the world of work so that your research is practical for you. What job or profession might you be interested in? Where can you find information about what this work consists of and whether people are needed in this field? What kind of training do you need to do this work well? Can you interview anyone who does the kind of work you would like to do? Can you live in your own community and make a living at this kind of work?

SUGGESTED READINGS

For the skilled reader:

The Jungle by Upton Sinclair

The Shame of the Cities by Lincoln Steffens

The Teapot Dome Scandal by Ida Tarbell

Yonnondio by Tillie Olsen

Hard Times or David Copperfield by Charles Dickens

All the President's Men by Woodward and Bernstein

Books from which selections can be made:

Silent Spring by Rachel Carson

Unsafe at Any Speed by Ralph Nader

General reading material:

Consumer Reports magazine

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

---------Find out what laws govern child labor today. Prepare a speech in which you defend the regulations as they exist or campaign for changes that would make these rules work better to your advantage.

---------Look for some current "muckrakers". Read what they've written and evaluate it. Do such people serve society?

---------Dramatize what you think labor conditions would have been like in the early 1900's.

---------Write a letter to the editor in which you suggest a reform.

---------Draw a cartoon that illustrates past evils or current concerns about the working world.

---------Invite a civic leader from the community to talk about what industries, if any, could/should be set up in your community.

---------Listen to some folk songs that were recorded and distributed during the protest movements of the 1960's and 1970's. Who seems to be the speaker in these songs? What kinds of things are being protested against? Can you detect any positive elements in these songs? For example, do they suggest ways in which things can be improved? Do they seem to have any faith that society <u>can</u> improve?

VOCABULARY

muckraker

exposé

liability

compensation

vexatious

Cal Coolidge's Vermont: Flood!

Even in a small town, where it may have seemed to the young people that nothing ever happened, events of major importance did occur. Such an event took place in 1927.

The autumn that year had been very mild and the foliage had been exceptionally beautiful. After a good deal of rain and only one October freeze, people seemed satisfied with the harvest season and prepared for the onset of winter.

There had been a few problems in some parts of the state with high water, and this caused at least one resident to reminisce:

> .....even if there should be a freshet, it could not be as bad as the one in 1852, when the Dishmill Brook at East Burke broke its banks, came down through the street in the night and carried off the bridge, the old gristmill, a house, shed and shop and left the new gristmill tottering on its foundations in the middle of a deep gulf many rods wide.
>
> No; nothing worse could happen than the Great Flood of 1869, which took out the two railroad bridges and the carriage bridge just above the Lyndon Mills, left the upper bridge hanging over the Falls and the railroad demoralized all the way to Wells River.
>
> Or the ice pack of 1915, when the river broke up in February and blocks of ice jammed against the dam at St. Johnsbury Center, causing the water to back up stream, flooding the village so that people had to be taken from the second story window in boats.

Although the anonymous writer of those paragraphs wanted to believe that Vermont had survived the worst already, the rains that started on the evening of November second and continued through until the fourth caused flooding much worse than any the state had experienced in the past. After 36 to 48 hours of rain the whole terrain was changed.

At first the rivers and brooks that usually overflowed during the spring run-off rose to their high water marks. As the hard rains continued,

though, the force of the water started to push at the land and the things that were on it with an astonishing force. Trees, branches and fences got swept along by the water; then homes and barns; even heavy machinery, bridges, and railroad tracks. Whole meadows of fine land were washed away and the landscape looked unfamiliar to people whose whole lives had been spent in that area.

When the rains stopped and the damage was surveyed, this was Vermont: towns and cities without electric service; gas and water and sewerage systems out of commission; railroads paralyzed; highways blocked; telephone and telegraph lines gone; towns cut off from their neighbors; residents trying to find food, drinking water, and most especially their friends lost in the destruction.

Herbert Hoover, then the United States Secretary of Commerce, was sent by President Coolidge to assess the damage done by the flood. He was told that he would see Vermont at its worst. After a week touring the state, however, Hoover concluded: "I have seen Vermont at its worst, but I also have seen Vermonters at their best!" With the help from the Red Cross and an exceptional amount of neighborly spirit, Vermonters set about restoring order and planning for rebuilding. Senator Frank Greene complimented the people of Vermont on their sturdiness. "Vermont," he said, "is going to be better than ever in the years to come. That is my sentiment!"

How individuals reacted to the devastation was recorded all over Vermont, and these recollections have been saved to show the strength of character of the people. In some of them, reproduced here from the book Lights and Shadows of the Flood of 1927 by Charles Walter, the reader might detect a little exaggeration or a little pulling of the recorder's leg. Even in floodtime, a Vermonter keeps a sense of humor.

OUT WITHOUT HIS UMBRELLA

The water in Waterbury rose four feet in a single hour, and of course caught many people unawares. One well-known character about town was found out in the street, in the fall-falling rain and in the water up to his arm-pits. He was yelling lustily. Luckily his S O S call was heard and a boat paddled to his relief. Asked why he was standing there, he answered: "It came over me all of a sudden, what a damn fool I am to be out on a night like this without an umbrella."

AN UNEVEN EXCHANGE

At the height of the flood on the lower Winooski, a farmer's barn with all its contents was swept from its foundation, carried down the river and totally destroyed. Half an hour after, another barn from a mile up stream came sailing down and lodged, with its full quota of cattle, hay and feed, on the foundation of the building that was lost. Soon, the owner of the up-river barn appeared, looked the situation over and decided that as it was so well placed, it would be folly to move it. This conversation followed:

"John, I guess I'll have to leave my barn here 'till spring, then, when it gets settled going, I'll come down and drag it back. It sets pretty well now, don't it! Almost looks as if it belonged here!"

"Well," said the farmer who had lost his barn, "it does belong here. It's my barn, I calculate. My barn's lost, and this one the Lord has provided to take its place. 'Course it's mine!"

"Well," concluded the rather dejected neighbor, " if you claim all that goes with it, I guess I'll have to go home and bring down mother and the six children!"

A STORY OR TWO

The afternoon of the flood, being rainy and disagreeable for outside work, a farmer in the central part of the state decided to drive up the river a few miles for a barrel of cider. Before he had gone far on his return trip, he was overtaken by the advance guard of destruction, making the highway impassable and necessitating a detour by a back road to higher ground, where he paused in amazement at the panorama of onrushing waters. After a while, along came the cider mill, mixed in with the confusion of rubbish. "By golly," he exclaimed, "if I'd supposed they were going to deliver cider, I wouldn't bothered to go up after it."

A PESSIMIST OR TWO

A resident of South Hadley Falls, Mass., fell heir to a chicken coop that came down the Connecticut on the crest of the flood from some southern Vermont town. It contained 15 live, full-grown chickens and all he complained about was that he had to go and buy some feed for them.

SIDE-LIGHTS

Someone has raised the interesting question as to whether the animals had any instinctive warning of the flood. The people did not and were caught napping, but were cats and dogs and wild life in particular forewarned of the disaster? One case is reported where the day before the flood a cat was busy all afternoon carrying her family of six small kittens, one by one, to higher ground. That night their former home was washed away and destroyed, but the nine-lived animals were saved.

TRYING TO DISCOUNT A VERMONTER'S STORY

On one occasion a Vermonter died and went to heaven. "Now," said Sir Henry Thornton of Canadian National Railways by way of parenthesis, "of course there's nothing strange or unusual about that, for I suppose all good Vermonters go to heaven. But just now, when a Vermonter shows up there, he is the center of considerable interest, for they want to hear the latest about the flood. This fellow," he continued, "was telling his experiences to an interested circle, when he noticed an old fellow, horning in over the shoulder of the one near him, listening a minute and then sniffing up his nose and going away. 'What's the matter with that fellow,' the new arrival asked of St. Peter. 'He don't seen to believe what I say.' 'Who do you mean?' asked St. Peter. 'Is it that old chap over there with a long, white beard and a sort of shawl about his shoulder? If so, don't worry. He don't amount to anything about here. That's old Noah!"

RECOMMENDED READING

Browse through some books that repute to quote native Vermonters and to repeat stories that Vermonters tell. Especially good and easy to find are:

What The Old-Timer Said To The Feller From Down Country
by Allen R. Foley

The Vermont Mind by Jeff Danziger

Yup..Nope and Other Vermont Dialogues by Keith Jennison

Walter Hard's Vermont People: A New Collection of Yankee Characters by Walter Hard and J. Kevin Graffagnino

New England Laughs by G. Donald Asselin

From reading these sketches,

---Draw in pictures or words what "The Vermonter" is.

---Compare these sketches with the ones about the flood victims. Is the image similar?

---Compare the image in the sketches with the real Vermonters you know. Defend in a speech or in writing your view of whether the image is a true one or not.

RECOMMENDED ACTIVITIES

The sketches reproduced here make the flood seem not so bad. Try to find out what people really felt and what they went through at this time.

---Interview local residents who remember this time.

---Look for signs or markers in your town that show the water level of the Flood of 1927 and try to imagine what it would be like to have water get that high again.

---Locate the report on the flood about your own community. Are there indications there that the flood was not such a source of amusement as these sketches lead us to believe?

---Think about why a legacy of the flood would be these stories that have become myths about the independent, thrifty Vermonter with a wry sense of humor.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

---Dramatize a farm or town family as they watch the waters rise and decide whether to abandon their home or not.

---Invite a member of the Forestry Service to come to your class to discuss today's efforts at flood control. Prepare some questions ahead of time. Try to find out, for example, whether a major flood could happen again, whether it would have been better or worse if the flood had come in January or April instead of November, whether bridges are built differently now so they could survive a major flood.

---Assemble pictures of how your community looked during and after the high flood waters. Write a narration for the pictures and prepare a slide/tape presentation.

VOCABULARY

terrain

assess

devastation

repute

wry

Bailey Library at UVM has a copy of the film "And the Water Came Down from the Hills: The 1927 Flood," produced and directed by Jerry Jones.

Cal Coolidge's Vermont: The President

When people think about New Englanders, and particularly Vermonters, who have made a reputation for themselves in this world, they are bound to recall the name of Calvin Coolidge, thirtieth president of the United States. If they were asked to name what he did, however, most would probably only recall that his nickname was "Silent Cal" from Vermont. It remains a puzzle how someone so well known at the same time is so little known.

To try to work out this puzzle, we begin with details of Calvin Coolidge's life that are clear and precise. He was born on Independence Day, 1872, in Plymouth, Vermont. His father was a quiet man who made his living by farming and running a country store. His mother bore two children and died when Calvin was twelve years old.

Cal went to school in Plymouth, then went to Black River Academy in Ludlow and St. Johnsbury Academy in St. Johnsbury, Vermont. No one remembers him as being an excellent student, but he was a hard-working one. He studied at Amherst College in Massachusetts and became a lawyer in that state.

Although Coolidge was known to be very shy, he married a very outgoing young woman named Grace Goodhue in 1905. They had two sons, John and Calvin. As the children were growing up, Coolidge supported the family through his law practice and also became very active in politics. In fact, he only lost one election in a long list of offices that he ran for. By 1919, he had become governor of Massachusetts.

Coolidge became known throughout America when he broke up the police strike in Boston in 1919. When the Republicans needed a candidate to run for vice-president in 1920, they chose Coolidge. He and Warren G. Harding, running for president, won that year. By 1923, Coolidge became

president because President Harding had died during his term. Coolidge was elected president for a term of his own in 1924.

All of these facts still don't tell us much about Coolidge--the type of person he was, the things he believed in, the values he held. After he left office in 1929, he wrote his autobiography, which helps a little in our understanding of this man. This is his description of his rather unusual inauguration as president in 1923 as he recorded it in The Autobiography of Calvin Coolidge.

> After President Harding was seriously stricken, although I noticed that some of the newspapers at once sent representatives to be near me at the home of my father in Plymouth, Vermont, the official reports which I received from his bedside soon became so reassuring that I believed all danger past.
>
> On the night of August 2, 1923, I was awakened by my father coming up the stairs calling my name. I noticed that his voice trembled. As the only times I had ever observed that before were when death had visited our family, I knew that something of the gravest nature had occurred.
>
> His emotion was partly due to the knowledge that a man whom he had met and liked was gone, partly to the feeling that must possess all of our citizens when the life of their President is taken from them.
>
> But he must have been moved also by the thought of the many sacrifices he had made to place me where I was, the twenty-five mile drives in storms and in zero weather over our mountain roads to carry me to the academy and all the tenderness and care he had lavished upon me in the thirty-eight years since the death of my mother in the hope that I might sometime rise to a position of importance, which he now realized.
>
> He had been the first to address me as President of the United States. It was the culmination of the lifelong desire of a father for the success of his son.

He placed in my hands an official report and told me that President Harding had just passed away. My wife and I at once dressed.

Before leaving the room I knelt down and, with the same prayer with which I have since approached the altar of the church, asked God to bless the American people and give me power to serve them.

My first thought was to express my sympathy of those who had been bereaved and after that was done to attempt to reassure the country with the knowledge that I proposed no sweeping displacement of the men then in office and that there were to be no violent changes in the administration of affairs. As soon as I had dispatched a telegram to Mrs. Harding, I therefore issued a short public statement declaratory of that purpose.

Meantime, I had been examining the Constitution to determine what might be necessary for qualifying by taking the oath of office. It is not clear that any additional oath is required beyond what is taken by the Vice-President when he is sworn into office. It is the same form as that taken by the President.

Having found this form in the Constitution I had it set up on the typewriter and the oath was administered by my father in his capacity as a notary public, an office he had held for a great many years.

The oath was taken in what we always called the sitting room by the light of the kerosene lamp, which was the most modern form of lighting that had then reached the neighborhood. The Bible which had belonged to my mother lay on the table at my hand. It was not officially used, as it is not the practice in Vermont or Massachusetts to use a Bible in connection with the administration of an oath.

Where succession to the highest office in the land is by inheritance or appointment, no doubt there have been kings who have participated in the induction of their sons into their office, but in republics where the succession comes by an election I do not know of any other case history where a father has administered to his son the qualifying oath of office which made him the chief magistrate of a nation. It seemed a simple and natural thing to do at the time, but I can now realize something of the dramatic force of the event.

While Coolidge held national office, many stories were created about him. He was believed to be the epitomé of the New England backwood's farmer who is thrifty, taciturn, slow but exact, and who saw the world with a wry sense of humor. As Coolidge himself realized, whatever about him didn't fit this character would be changed for the sake of a good story. Most of what we know about Coolidge comes from these stories rather than from historical records.

Here are some of the ingredients of the mythic Calvin Coolidge.

He was so quiet that he was said to be fluent at silence in five different languages. When he opened his mouth, moths flew out.

His qualifications for the presidency were jeered at. Who could trust a President, it was said, who used to live in a middle-class duplex. One critic called him "the closest we've come to having nobody for president."

His habit of taking a nap each afternoon made many government officials angry. One person, however, said this was a good thing. It kept him and the rest of the government out of everyone's way. He was called "a study of inertia."

Workers in the White House complained because he was stingy and checked up on them every day by inspecting the storerooms and kitchens.

Coolidge disliked the social customs of Washington. At a dinner party he was asked why he came since he disliked them so much. "Got to eat somewhere" was his answer. A woman said to him, "Mr. Coolidge, I've made a rather sizable bet with my friends that I can get you to speak three words this evening." Coolidge snapped back, "You lose."

Will Rogers, a humorist and journalist, wrote many of his newspaper columns about Coolidge because he thought the man was genuinely funny, even when he didn't mean to be. Rogers asked him how he stayed so well in such a difficult job. Coolidge was quoted as answering, "By avoiding the big problems." Reading Rogers' "Thar's Bars in Them Hills," you can get a further idea of how Coolidge and his home state were made fun of by newspaper people.

Even Coolidge's critics had to agree that he had good qualities: he was thoroughly honest; he truly listened; he acted when he believed action was called for; he was loyal to his beliefs. In 1927 he announced that he would not run again for the office of president because the country needed new leadership. Many people applauded his ability to step aside gracefully. Others were enraged because they felt that if he had been more of a leader in the previous four years, the country wouldn't have so desperately needed a new leader.

During his years as President, income taxes went down, the nation was prosperous, government agencies were made smaller, the Prohibition Act was in effect and disobeyed almost everywhere, Sacco and Vanzetti were put to death for being labor agitators, and Charles A. Lindgergh made a solo flight to Paris. In 1929, the stock market crashed and the country went into a severe depression.

Were the bad times after Coolidge really Coolidge's fault? Was he the right person to govern for that period of time? Were his policies good ones and the bad results unavoidable? These are hard questions that historians and economists still try to answer. We might continue to ask, though, after all the stories about Coolidge and the sayings of Silent Cal that have come down to us, just who was this person Calvin Coolidge.

THAR'S BARS IN THEM HILLS

I don't know what Mr. Coolidge wants to go away out there to the Black Hills in South Dakota for. If I was a man that was looking for some hills I sure wouldent pay any transportation away out to any South Dakota. I would go right up to a State called Vermont and I would hunt up a place called Plymouth and he will have him about as many hills as a man can scenically digest in any one vacation.

I have just been up there. Vermont has got Black ones. Green ones, White ones, any kind, color, shape or size Hill that you want. Why when it comes to having hills, Dakota is just an amateur. Vermont has misplaced more Hills than Dakota's Chamber of Commerce has on their list. So I don't know what he is going to the Black Hills to hunt hills for. Why Vermont has more hills in what they call their valleys than Dakota can produce on top of their hills. A Vermont farm don't lay. It hangs.

When your corn grows up big enough to gather you go up on the farm and shake the ears off and they fall in the barn. Now that's as I say if a man is looking to vacate among the hills. Now you see that's what makes you lose confidence in him in a way, especially if you have been there and see what he is leaving. It kinder makes you doubt sometimes if he really is going to Dakota just on account of the Hills.

Now, I am not hinting anything. I am just sorter soliloquizing out loud. We will take for instance suppose he had during this last session of Congress vetoed a Maple Syrup Bill, and there was enough Maple Syrup catchers to kinder clog up a few voting booths. Now, do you think he would a been hunting the hills of Dakota or the hills of Vermont? Suppose he had lowered the duty on imported Tombstones, and Vermont with her monotony of marking the spot "Where body was last seen."

Don't it kinder look like he would a gone back up there for the summer to kinder cheer the boys up that had a surplus of stones on their hands, and the dying not hardly keeping up to normal? Yes, sir, he would a done something for them, even if it was to put out a slogan, "Use home talent Tombstones. These foreign ones won't last even till you are forgotten."

Now you see Maple Syrup and Tombstones are protected by the Tariff, so there is no use going up there to pacify them this summer.

Now it has been intimated by some that the fishing was what he was going to Black Hills for. Now there's another misleading statement. There is more fish in Vermont than all the Dakotas put together. I imagine that Dakota (including the Non-Partisan league) have more queer fish than Vermont. Vermont's is a more conservative fish.

He don't go in for many new fangled ideas or new ways of doing things. You see, the reason there is more fish in Vermont is economy. The fishermen up there don't spare much bait. They try to get what few they can with just an empty hook. If you want to be extravagant and really use plenty of bait why you can get all the great fishing you want in Vermont.

by Will Rogers

RECOMMENDED READINGS

Read some of the work of Will Rogers, who began his humorous essays with the sentence, "I only know what I read in the papers."

Choose a well known figure from the national scene--a politician, an entertainer, a celebrity, a leader. Write down what you believe you know about that person. Then try to find written material about that person. How much did you really know? Did you find any facts that might contradict what you believed?

SUGGESTED READINGS

Read about an event that took place during Cal Coolidge's years as Vice-President and then President of the United States (1920-1928). Report to the class on the event and its importance.

- Babe Ruth hits 60 home runs.
- Al Capone terrorizes Chicago.
- Charles Lindbergh makes a solo flight across the Atlantic.
- Motion pictures begin to "talk."
- The Kellogg-Briand Peace Pact is signed.
- Richard Byrd flies over the North Pole.
- Civil War rages in China.
- The "Jazz Age" captures the energy of the country.
- The Teapot Dome Scandal embarrasses the government.
- Scopes trial of a school teacher takes place in Tennessee.
- Sacco and Vanzetti are charged with murder.
- Radio station KDKA begins regular broadcasting.
- Woman Suffrage wins approval.
- Mickey Mouse becomes a star.
- Amelia Earhart attempts to fly across the Atlantic.

RECOMMENDED ACTIVITIES

--- Visit Plymouth, Vermont to see the homestead where Coolidge was born and raised. Use the guide that comes with this unit to make your trip more meaningful.

--- Write a piece of satire like that by Will Rogers in which you poke a little fun at a well-known figure.

--- Analyze what you know of the country today and what you know of Coolidge. Explain whether you think he could make it as governor? Mayor of your town? president? principal of your school?

--- Compare in writing the image of Coolidge and the image of the Vermonter you learned about in the section on the flood of 1927.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

--- Launch a campaign for Coolidge that would get him elected to an office you think he should hold. You'll need slogans, speeches, a platform on the issues, and some strong selling points.

--- Listen to the record of music by the Plymouth Dance Band, stocked by Coolidge Foundation.* Try to put into words the changes in music you hear from what was contemporary with Coolidge's time and what we enjoy today.

--- Turn the account of Coolidge's inaugural at Plymouth into a short play.

*The Calvin Coolidge Memorial Foundation (Woodstock, VT 05091) puts out a newsletter, Plymouth Notch Newsletter, which lists its latest products and acquisitions. Its activities are directed towards the enhancement and preservation of knowledge about Coolidge and the Plymouth area.

VOCABULARY

epitomé

taciturn

inertia

A FIELD TRIP TO PLYMOUTH, VERMONT

At the Coolidge homestead in Plymouth Notch, you will find several buildings that will help you to understand the life and times of Calvin Coolidge. At your first stop, the Visitor's Center, you will see photographs, art work, and writings about President Coolidge's life. In the Wilder Barn, you will see farming implements and vehicles that Calvin Coolidge would have used as he worked on the family farm. The Coolidge Homestead is furnished just as it was when the Coolidges lived there and you can learn a great deal about the family's daily life from studying the items in the house and the way they are arranged. Another important house for you to visit is the Coolidge birthplace. You will be able to see how the family's possessions and way of life changed as Calvin was growing up. The one room schoolhouse in Plymouth is newer than the one Calvin attended; this one was built in 1890. It is not open for visitors.

Your teacher may direct you to find the answers to one or some of these questions.

1. How did the Coolidge family make a living? What other occupations were available to people who lived in Plymouth?

2. What forms of community entertainment could people take part in during Cal Coolidge's youth?

3. How did people get around in Cal's youth?

4. What can you find out about Coolidge's Campaign for President?

   Running mate_____
   slogans _____
   songs _____
   campaign trips_____
   campaign promises_____

5. Find out at least 5 elective offices Coolidge held before becoming President.

6. How were homes like the Coolidge homestead heated? What did people use to provide light in their homes?

7. Find at least 5 machines on display that helped to make work on the homestead easier. Draw one.

8. How are the 2 Coolidge homes (the birthplace and the homestead) different? In what ways are they similar?

9. Notice the rooms in the homestead. Which have wallpaper? Which have rugs? What articles of furniture are found in the main rooms? What important items from your home are not a part of Coolidge's home?

Once you know what you are looking for, you may find that it's useful to you to keep your notes in the following form.

WHAT YOU FOUND	WHERE YOU FOUND IT

Dear Colleague:

In deciding whether to modify the curriculum unit you have received and whether to get teachers together to develop similar units on aspects of Vermont, I need your reactions.

Please send back this tear sheet to Patricia Austin, Vermont Department of Education, Montpelier, Vermont 05602, preferably by March 1.

1. *Did you use this unit:*

   In part?

   Which parts?

   As a whole?

2. *If you used it,*

   what worked?

   what didn't work?

   General student reaction?

3. *If you chose not to use it,*

   why?

4. *Even if you didn't use it,*

   any suggestions for items to be added?

   anything here you think should be deleted?

   any modifications you'd like to see made?

5. *Do you think other units about Vermont should be prepared?*

6. *Would you be interested in working on the preparation of other units?*

   Any ones in particular?

NAME _____

SCHOOL _____

GRADE/SUBJECT _____